

## Activists Hand Brooms to Dow Chemicals Director

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Chicago -- Demonstrating rights activists in the US observed the 20th anniversary of the Bhopal gas leak disaster here by handing over a protest letter and some brooms to a member of the board of directors of Dow Chemical Corporation.

Volunteers of the South Asian Progressive Action Collective (SAPAC) had gone to the residence of James M. Ringler in Lake Forest, Illinois, last week to hand him a letter and brooms to signify the demand that Dow clean up the Bhopal site. "Ringler opened the door but did not accept the letter or the brooms and asked us to get off his property," said Maneesha Bidani of SAPAC. The activists stood outside his home and shouted slogans. Ringler called the police. "But the policemen were very respectful. They did not act to remove us and even took some of our fact sheets (on the Bhopal tragedy)," she added. On Dec 2-3 night, 1984, poisonous methyl isocyanate gas leaked from the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, resulting in the death of 3,000 people that night.

Over 20,000 people have since died of after effects of the gas. Dow acquired the Union Carbide plant in 2001. The letter to Ringler, signed by several SAPAC activists, said: "We would like you to take a moment and imagine with us what must seem like a remote possibility to you. Imagine that you wake on this cold December night to sounds of your children coughing. You feel a stinging sensation in your eyes and experience difficulty breathing. You are confused as you stumble to try and locate the cause of your discomfort and hear shouts of panic. "Imagine leaving your house and seeing neighbours and acquaintances all moving in a daze, vomiting, coughing and even urinating, as they try to move toward some type of safety. Imagine trying to

reassure your children as you find yourself in this crowd of humanity suddenly levelled of all position, title and prestige."

SAPAC volunteers noted that the gas leak had wiped out more than 20,000 people, or the population of Lake Forest where Ringler lives. "Imagine if this had happened in your community. Imagine if you and your neighbours could not even get access to the composition and nature of the gases that leaked that night so that an appropriate medical strategy could be designed. Imagine if the company that operated the plant had never even bothered to appear in court to face the criminal charges and repeated court summons from your community. Mr. Ringler - what would your sentiments be today?"

The Chicago Tribune published a letter from US Representative Jan **Schakowsky** saying: "On this tragic anniversary, we must renew our commitment to the people of Bhopal."

### **Schakowsky**

was among the 18 members of the US Congress who wrote to Dow Chemical in 2003 calling Union Carbide an 'absconder from justice' and describing Dow Chemical's refusal to deal with the tragedy as a 'blatant disregard for the law.'

In neighbouring Wisconsin, two survivors of the Bhopal gas leak led a candle light vigil at Mahatma Gandhi's statue in Milwaukee, to remember the victims and 'express solidarity with their ongoing struggle for justice at the still-contaminated site'. Volunteers of several groups - Association for India's Development (AID) Milwaukee chapter, Education for the People! and Peace Action Network - also participated in the event.